

plena a ese compromiso y lo sitúa como uno de los adalides de la corriente rehumanizadora que imprimiría un nuevo rumbo a nuestra literatura en la década de los treinta.

Por todo ello, estas *Crónicas de la guerra de Marruecos* son un libro de lectura imprescindible para quienes quieran profundizar en el contexto de aquel conflicto que marcó definitivamente una época crucial de la historia española; pero constituyen, asimismo, un ejemplo impagable de cómo el desencadenante de toda creación literaria auténtica consiste ante todo en un nuevo modo de mirar la realidad: el joven escritor de 23 años, sumergido de pronto en un mundo tan alejado del suyo habitual como absurdo y hostil, nos ofrece con su mirada limpia y su escritura exenta de tópicos y clisés belicistas la dimensión más auténtica y profunda de esa trágica guerra en la que tanta sangre joven se derramó inútilmente.

No queda, pues, sino recomendar vivamente su lectura y felicitar a José Ramón González por su iniciativa de rescatar estos textos y por la acertada selección que ha hecho del material disponible ya que las 62 crónicas elegidas de entre las 202 publicadas en el diario gijonés (la relación de todas ellas puede encontrarse en el apéndice que cierra el libro) constituyen una ejemplar antología.

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CREACIÓN

Montero, Rosa. *Historia del rey transparente*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2005. 527 pp.

«Soy mujer y escribo.» Readers familiar with the novels of Rosa Montero have come to anticipate the first, initially disorienting sentence of the text that drops, rather than eases, them into the thick of the narration and that, by the end of the story, has been transformed into an idea central to the novel, and in several cases, to the narrative world of the author. This holds true for Montero's most recent novel, *Historia del rey transparente* (2005). Encapsulated in the above sentence are several of the most important themes of this novel as well as those that have consistently defined Montero's fiction: the importance of the word, gender, and identity.

Set in the framework of an adventure novel and anchored roughly in the XII and XIII centuries in southern France, *Historia del rey transparente* is the first-person narration of Leola, a young peasant girl who, after a life-altering event, changes the course of her life and her identity. Despite the Medieval time frame and the evident documentation of the period present in descriptions of characters, customs and events, the author has clearly stated in interviews about the novel that it is not a historical novel. It is rather, as all her previous novels are, a very contemporary story about self, life, and finding one's place in the world.

Structurally the novel also reflects several of Montero's primary novelistic practices of the past quarter century. On the one hand is the author's ongoing experimentation with elements of different genres, as evidenced here primarily by the incorporation of elements of the adventure tale as well as those of fantasy. More subtle however is her usual careful attention to the internal structure of the novel which, as in previous novels, serves to accentuate specific thematic elements. In *Historia del rey transparente*, although the bulk of the tale is chronological, encompassing Leola's narration of her adventures from adolescence into adulthood, at the end of the more than 500 pages the reader realizes that the narration has in fact been embedded into the narrator's present and final moments. This underlying circular structure thus highlights the fully-conscious aspect of the protagonist's final acts and words, giving them greater poignancy and resonance.

As noted, the principal themes of the novel are consonant as well with Montero's narrative world to date. Yet, as her assiduous readers recognize, there is an ongoing evolution of these primary themes in each novel. One example is the ever-present theme of love. Although love is an important question for Leola, the very core of the issue has evolved greatly from earlier novels. Gone is the dichotomous distinction elaborated in *La función delta* between passionate love and compromise love. In this novel, as in recent past novels of the author, one's ability to love and be loved is consciously connected to the question of identity; Leola is not able to fully love another until she has negotiated her own selfhood.

Another theme central to this novel is that of religion and its role in one's personal life as well as in the public sphere. The time frame of the narration naturally highlights several specific issues, primary among them the crusades and the notion of Christianity struggling against the infidel as well as the reform movements within the Catholic church; both issues that resonate in today's society. The approach to the question of religion is structured in a fashion similar to that used in *Temblor*: the young protagonist—who initially holds a traditional, unquestioning belief in basic aspects of Christian Thought as is typical of her social class—comes to question through experience, education and use of reason, certain aspects of organized religion—primarily hypocrisy, abuse of power, and fanaticism. New however, is the fuller exploration of certain positive aspects of religious faith, as embodied in the novel by the Cathari (known also as the Albigenses). Although Leola does not convert to Catharism, her admiration for their sincerity and purity of belief in both word and act leads her to make a conscious choice to defend them, which ultimately leads to a situation in which the protagonist must make the most final of choices.

Leola's final choice, suicide, brings together two themes that are repeatedly central issues in Montero's narrative, identity and death. Yet once again the trajectory of these two crucial themes has changed considerably over the years. In early novels, Montero's characters tended more to «dis-

cover» who they were and their place in the world. This has shifted in recent novels to a more dynamic and engaged approach to identity, with characters actively constructing their identity, as does Lucia in *La hija del caníbal*, and moreover taking responsibility for this active construction as epitomized by Sofia in *El corazón del tártaro*.

In *Historia del rey transparente* these two concepts, active and conscious identity construction, form the core of the development of Leola. Using a novelistic device now characteristic of her novels as a catalyst, the life altering event (in this case the loss of her beloved Jacques and her home), Leola begins to evaluate and re/construct her identity. This process, unconscious at first, is aided and guided to a certain extent by Nyneve, the protagonist's companion in arms who represents the role of the older, sage woman. The process entails arduous physical and psychological travails, a number of which embody the concepts of transgression and marginalization. An example of the former is Leola's choice to disguise herself and lead the life of a knight. Transgressing both gender and social class lines, Leola learns to view the world from a different perspective and eventually to analyze and evaluate the impact of this adopted role on the construction of her selfhood.

A primary tool in the development of Leola's consciousness of self is her ability to understand the written word. As Nyneve teaches her to read and write, Leola, the former peasant, understands that her world is not limited to the narrow, miserable confines into which she was born. Nor is she limited to a specific, predetermined role. Yet within this realization of expanded possibilities lies the concept of the responsibility of choice. After a dramatic event in which Leola critically and negatively analyzes her behavior, she comes to understand that her actions and words have repercussions not only on the construction of self but also on the world in which she moves.

However, the full assumption of responsibility liberates Leola not only to make very difficult decisions, but to be at peace with these decisions and their outcome. The ultimate example of this is the final scene of the novel. Having chosen to defend and stand by the Cathari, the protagonist consciously and with hope chooses the manner in which she will leave this world. Her enviable personal state of liberation and sufficiency is movingly represented in her final thoughts before taking her life:

Soy mujer y escribo. Soy plebeya y sé leer. Nací sierva y soy libre. ¿No es hermoso todo lo que la vida me ha dado? Me siento en paz dentro de mis ropas de mujer y de mi pellejo recosido por cicatrices. Esto es lo que soy, y no está mal. (513)

May we all possess this state of mind during our final moments.

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